



TriCounty Watchdogs

*...protecting mountain resources and communities
in Kern, Los Angeles, and Ventura Counties.*

Sandra Meraz
Central Valley RWQCB

Date 6/29/09

Dear Sandra,

TCW
P.O. Box 2458
Frazier Park
California 93225
tcwdogs@frazmtn.com
www.tcwdogs.org

I'm writing to you in your capacity as a California Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board member. Since we've been friends for a long time, you're aware that I'm currently living in Lebec, California. I understand that Lebec is in the very southern region of the CCVRWQCB's boundaries.

I am currently the president of a local environmental community organization called The TriCounty Watchdogs (TCW). TCW has members from, and concerns involving, the communities in the south/west portion of Kern County (Lebec, Frazier Park, Lake of the Woods, Pinon Pines and Pine Mountain Club) - the north/west corner of Los Angeles County (Gorman and Neenach) and the north/east corner of Ventura County (Lockwood Valley). All of our mountain communities are in close proximity to the Grapevine portion of Interstate 5. Our communities of concern are all unincorporated and, as you well know, unincorporated regions often have a great deal of difficulty getting the appropriate attention they need from their government representatives.

The reason I am writing you today is because TCW has a specific concern in the community of Lebec that involves water that we feel is putting the health and well being of the residents in our region at risk. We also believe that no governmental agency or representative body is taking the proper steps to protect the interests of the people who are being impacted by these current activities.

The area of concern that I refer to is on Tejon Ranch property. As you may be fully aware, Tejon Ranch owns a great deal of property in my region. Tejon Ranch has various development plans on their property. The development plan that involves the concern of this letter is around the Castac lake in Lebec. Castac lake has been a streambed runoff catch basin for our

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region. Naturally, Castac was a seasonal lake that was often no more than a marshy swamp area that supplied a thriving environment for wetland wildlife. But in the last few years, Tejon Ranch has been using groundwater to keep the lake full year round. The reason they have been artificially maintaining the lake's capacity is because the ranch has been in the process of developing plans for a luxury housing development to be built around the lake. Our community members have heard reports that the lake has been dredged to reduce its salinity and to enlarge its capacity. Also we understand that it is being aerated and manipulated in other ways to maintain its aesthetic value for future sales of the planned homes. TriCounty Watchdogs and other community members are concerned about the volume of groundwater that is being used by Tejon Ranch to maintain Castac Lake artificially. We fear that Tejon Ranch is using a great deal of groundwater to compensate for the loss of water through evaporation and also to flush through the lake to keep it in a state of viability. Naturally this lake was known as a "soda-lake" and the unnatural manipulation has totally changed its ecological nature. The lake and the wells that are used to maintain the artificial elevation of the lake are all under the Tejon-Castac Water District. Tejon Ranch executives make-up the board of the Tejon-Castac Water District. The implications of how the groundwater is being used to turn what would naturally be an ephemeral lake into a permanent lake (for the purpose of financial gain) and Tejon Ranch executives controlling the water district board seems like a real conflict of interests to many local residents.

Recently, Tejon Ranch released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the luxury housing development that I referred to earlier. This development includes approximately 3500 housing units, two golf courses and a commercial area. This development is called Tejon Mountain Village (TMV). Tejon Ranch has stated that there will be no groundwater used for the development. The houses, golf course and stores etc will use the Ranch's rights to utilize water from the Kern County and Antelope Valley water banks. Tejon claims that the lake is not part of the development and they have excluded it from the DEIR for TMV; although the lake was included in the project's earlier Notice of Preparation (NOP). The TriCounty Watchdogs and other community members believe that Tejon Ranch's claim that Castac Lake is not part of the project is a dishonest tactic that they are using to reduce environmental review and expedite the process of approval to build the large housing project. As I mentioned, the

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lake was previously included as part of the project in the earlier released NOP, and the lake was also touted as a recreational benefit to the TMV project in promotional materials that Tejon Ranch circulated in the past. The project is obviously built to surround the lake to make the lake a focal point of the project as you can see in the attachment to this letter in figure 3-8 from the TMV DEIR.

Our mountain communities are completely dependent on groundwater for our drinking and home use. Many of us in the region are concerned that the water Tejon Ranch is pulling from our local aquifer to maintain the lake could be threatening our own wells, especially in this time of long term drought. This huge draw from the local aquifer could not only impact the quantity of groundwater in our region, but also the quality.

Other concerns involving the lake and its artificial state, is that the lake can no longer serve as a catch basin for run off. In 2005 there was a large flood downstream from the lake that caused thousands of dollars worth of damage to property at the Fort Tejon State Park, our local middle school in Lebec (school children actually had to be sent home early from school one day in the middle of the flooding) and to local county roads downstream from the lake. Many of us are convinced that this event would not have happened if the lake had been in its natural state and had been able to take in all of the runoff water. The TriCounty Watchdogs and others are convinced it's very likely this kind of incident will happen periodically. How can such a large corporation like Tejon Ranch alter the natural water flow in a region and create such a dangerous situation for the neighboring residents without any consequences or review?

The TriCounty Watchdogs also believe that the water quality of the lake has been compromised as has the water quality of Grapevine creek, which is downstream from the lake. The TMV DEIR shows very poor water quality in Grapevine Creek near the lake, with improvement at sampling sites farther away as it mixes with other sources. It seems to us that someone in an official capacity should be aware of all that is happening in the manipulation of this relatively large body of water.

Sandra, I'm writing you this letter asking for you to help us if you possibly can. We need for the Central Valley Regional Water Board to investigate

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the Castac Lake situation. We need a formal investigation into what is happening with our local water supply.

I appreciate your serious commitment to protecting the interests of the ordinary people who are so very dependent on the various agencies who oversee the water we too often take for granted. I hope you will forward this letter to your colleagues and the staff of your board and you and the other representatives will investigate our concern.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

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Sincerely,

Linda MacKay, President
TriCountry Watechdogs